

# Defense Secretary Panetta plans weeklong visit with European allies

Jan. 10, 2013

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta will depart Jan. 14 on a weeklong trip to Europe, visiting Portugal, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little told reporters here Jan. 8.

During the trip, Panetta will meet with his defense counterparts and discuss the mission in Afghanistan, Little said.

"The secretary of defense wants to see very strong NATO allies, who have fought and died in Afghanistan," Little said. "There is a lot of work to be done with our European allies."

These nations combined have provided thousands of troops to the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan, he noted. The trip is an opportunity for Panetta to reaffirm the strong U.S. commitment to transatlantic defense alliances and to develop deeper relationships with those allies, Little said.

Little noted that defense leaders from all four countries have visited the United States, but that this would be Panetta's first trip to any of them as defense secretary.

"We view it as a way of signaling our strong commitment to NATO and to our partners and allies who have been with us in Afghanistan and through many other challenges," he said.

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